

## [Erik Christian Jensen #1]

Mass. [1938-9?] Erik Christian Jensen - Paper 1

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

NAME OF WORKER EMILY B. MOORE

ADDRESS WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

DATE OF INTERVIEW JUNE 1, 1939

SUBJECT LIVING LORE

NAME OF INFORMANT ERIK CHRISTIAN JENSEN

ADDRESS WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Name: Emily B. Moore

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Erik Christian Jensen

Topic: Danish Steel Worker< - Paper 1

"You think I'm Swede, (laughs) Jah! not only you thinks that - everybody does, if he don't know Erik. Denmark was where I was born, in 1870, and not 'til 1893 do I come to this country. Well, you see, in Denmark, all the country is flat, very low, and if there was anything to see, you could see it as far away as Boston. I think the best sight I ever see, it vos the rocks and stones I see coming to Worcester, - why they stick right out of the ground, and they build houses on rocks, and make buildings on rocks! Jah! When I want

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me to build mine house, all around I looks for a place on the rocks or the hills, and I find me one, and I says to my missus, 'On this rock hill, will we build, and here it is; we can see 'out' and down; we can look down and see water, and look out and see hills.' All my life in Denmark, never once did I see a hill.

"Not much work in Denmark for young men, and I have a friend who comes to America and works in wire mill. He writes me letter to come on, so I come. No, I don't work in mill in Denmark, I teach High School. Well, when I'm a very young boy, maybe 14 or 15, I work on a farm and in the fields, and one day we carry logs on our shoulder, for lumber. I carry the front end and he carries the back, and he trips and lets his end fall, and it goes on my back, and I breaks three joints. Well, I have one doctor, and he says I can get no better; then I have another doctor, and the same things says he. I think to myself, 'the Jensen family are well family and good family, and they should not suffer, but die in their sleep.' My father had two 2 brothers, and they all go to sleep and die, and the some should I do. My father was well, eat good supper, and lay down on the bed, and my sister put shawl over him, and we play cards at the table. We go to bed, and in morning, my father just like we left him, only dead. He never suffer, just sleep away. Only three doctors we have there, and two tell me I should just die. I go see other doctor and he says, 'Why you come to me when other doctors tell you that you should die?' I said to him, 'I don't want to die; why should I die just because three of my bones is dead; that's not the best part of me! I am goin' to live!' Well, the doctor says, 'With your strong will to live, you can live, and I'll help you!' Now, five years he doctors me, and all the time, I read and study, and when I can go about, I am a teacher. Oh, I teach Danish talk, arithmetic, and handcraft [handicraft?] , - but I don't like that, so I come to America.

"Like this, it is; I get to Worcester on Sunday night, and on Monday morning, I go to work at the wire mill. (Washburn-Moen). I worked there two months, then the work went flat. I didn't know what to do, then, but the rich people here was all riding bicycles, the big high ones, so I went to all the people and see if I could fix their bicycles, and that's how I got started. I stayed on a farm and worked for my board, and fixed bicycles at night. No, I

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couldn't talk English, but I had a boy that could talk, go with me. Well, I could talk Swedish, and most of the men I talked to was Swedes. Well, I learnt it myself.

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In Denmark we had a paper called 'the Youth's Companion' and I always read that, and when I come here the only paper I could ask for was 'Youth's Companion.' I knowed the kind of stories they had, and I'd learn one work, and then guess the next two. I didn't think it was so hard, for I didn't have anything much to do and I knowed how to study. In six months I could talk English, and after that it wasn't hard.

"I worked at odd jobs for a year, and then they called me back to the wire mill. Oh, I worked at first, with pick and shovel, and it was hard on my back. I used to get wire for the bicycle repairing, and the bosses got to know me, and I made some good advice about the wire, and sometimes the owners, mind you, would come by and stop and talk to me and ask me things. One day I was, 'tin plating' some wire for my bicycle 'spokes' and they come up and talked to me, and asked me if I could 'tin plate' all the wire, and I said 'yes', and they gave me all the wire to 'tin plate.' After that time, I did all the 'tin plate' and I have my own end of the mill. Now, I do all the fine wire for pianos, guitar strings and all music wires. Nobody knows about them but Erik Jensen, and they always come now and talk to me, and when the United States Steel took over the factory, they told me I would always have my shop, just like when Washburn had the wire mill.

"Accidents, Jah! Lots of accidents them days, but now they never 4 happen. One time I saw a man get scattered all over the place. His legs went one way, and his arm another way, and his brain was throwed by me feet. He was painter and was up high on a ladder, and he had a white duck suit on, so we could see him. He got caught in the 'frame' and was pulled apart in every direction. Now, at the mill, we have a lot of safety, and we only have small accidents, like maybe a finger or sometimes, only a foot, but not big accidents. Every day a inspector comes around and write on a paper what he sees, and once a month we all have to go to a meeting and they tell us how to be careful. Then we have

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the relief, and if we get hurt, they take care of us. No, I don't mean the Social Security, that's something different. I think it's good, for they have that in Denmark for a long time. Over there they all pay into it and then when you get too old to work, you get money back. You don't get back just what you put in it, but if a man puts money into it, and dies, what he puts in, they divide, and everybody gets part of what he put in. Jah! the wire mill's a good place to work, and if I was starting in again, I'd work there, but there's trouble in young fellows stayin' one place too long. Maybe if I'd gone some other place, I might be a superintendent! - but I ain't got no kick comin', I'm just like my own boss; they never bother me none. Why, - when I built mine house here, they sent someone to tell me to come to the office; all the big owners was there, and they said to me, 'Erik, you're a good man, and we like you, and you're building a 5 house. Now, if you need any money, all you got to do is tell us how much, and you can have any amount you need. Better to not go in debt, and we want to do all we can for good men like you.' I said, 'I thanks you all, but I have money for the land 10 years ago, and now I have money for the house, and I don't need anything, but mebbe to go out onct or so to see if they do the work right.' Well, now, they said I could go, and I did go out lots of times. That was good for me, [sos?], you see, I ain't got no kick comin'; they was good to me.

"One thing I don't like too much, and that's the pension. Yennarally, people looks forward to it, but I don't. When I was a young fellow, I looked old, and now that I'm old, I look young and I feel young and want to keep on working. My mudder said when I was 15 I looked old, maybe 25. Next year I'll be 70 and the new laws say I have to quit work. They's givin' me half pay, but I don't like that. I likes to work for what I get. I don't feel no older now than I was 30 years ago.

"Jah! I married my woman from Denmark. I worked / for four years and then went back and got her. She's a good woman and always stands by. Mine girl is good girls. Well, a few years ago I thinks the young people were all wrong; that they was goin' too fast, but now I think they have straightened themselves out. The young American people drink too much, but the trouble about that is they don't start till 6 about high school days. The Germans and

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the Danes always drink beer from the time theys little kids, and then when they grow up, it don't mean nothin' to them. A few years ago mine girls belonged to a Danish Club and we thought they all went crazy, but now, about 15 couples of them got married and got nice homes, and the rest of them are al all -right now. Oh, yes, mine missus and me belong to a Danish club; its the Danish-American Friendship Society. There's only about three or four hundred Danish people in Worcester, so we all stick together, but we do mix it up a bit with the Swedes.

"There wasn't much for a young man to do here, when I come here; but work, but on Sundays we'd take bicycle rides. I had a bicycle, a high one, with a tandum, and I used to take my missus for long rides. We go with about 20 other couples, and take our lunch, or stop for a ice cream soda; that was something new for us, for we never had ice cream mixed with anything in Denmark. About all my good times was bicycle riding. We had a club of riders, and we used to have what they called 'Century Rides', and manys the time I rode 100 miles on Sundays. They didn't have good roads, and I don't know which was the worse, for as soon as the good roads got here, the traffic got too bad. If people only knowed what was good for them, they'd ride a bicycle. Just last summer a woman 65 years old come to me and told me she has something the matter with her 'innerts' and she was told to do some high-falutin' exercise with her legs, and it was like bicycle ridin', so she thought she'd get a bicycle and ride; and get the air at the same time. Well, she got a bicycle from me, and she come back 7 in two months, and she looked like a different person. I think bicycle ridin' keeps me young, and my missus and me ride whenever we get a chance."

At this point the shop door banged and in marched a couple of towheaded youngsters with a disreputable piece of machinery they referred to as "the bike." Old Erik forgot me entirely as he began to work with battered wires and bolts, all the time keeping up a stream of conversation with his customers.